

Cleanup of Armstrong World Industries St. Helens Site (ECSI 91)

Background

This fact sheet describes current cleanup issues concerning the Armstrong World Industries/St. Helens Fiberboard Plant site in St. Helens, Oregon. The roughly 175-acre site is at 1645 Railroad Ave. and lies along Scappoose Bay, about one mile south of the city. The mouth of Milton Creek lies along the northeastern site boundary. The site is generally surrounded by wetlands areas and mostly lies within the 100-year flood zone.

This property has been used for fiberboard manufacturing since 1929. The former owners include Fir-Tex Insulation Board (1929 to 1938), Dant and Russell (1939 to 1956), Kaiser Gypsum (1956 to 1978), and Owens Corning Fiberglas Corporation (1978 to 1987). The current owner (since 1987) is Armstrong World Industries.

Plant process wastewater was directly discharged into bordering wetlands and Scappoose Bay until Armstrong acquired the facility in 1987. A wastewater treatment facility was built in 1960 to separate solids from the wastewater. During its ownership of the property, Armstrong has treated wastewater prior to discharging it to the City of St. Helens wastewater treatment plant.

DEQ identified the site as a concern in the early 1990s. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency completed a site prioritization for the property in 1993 but referred the site back to the state. The state had identified the site as a low priority but in 2000, based on DEQ's revised approach to the Site Discovery review process, DEQ reevaluated the site to high-priority status.

In 2001, DEQ issued a Unilateral Order to Armstrong World Industries requiring a remedial investigation and feasibility study to address on-going environmental concerns. In 2002, DEQ reached a settlement agreement with Owens Corning to resolve cleanup liability for upland property as part of the company's bankruptcy. Armstrong investigation work has continued since that time, with partial funding of the work coming from the Owens Corning settlement.

In 2008, DEQ and Kaiser Gypsum Company signed a voluntary agreement for investigation of the site's in-water portion. Armstrong and Owens Corning are participating in the in-water study.

Current cleanup investigation activities

This site's cleanup investigation is nearly complete. Primary chemicals of concern there include metals and dioxins/furans.

The investigation has included sampling and laboratory analyses of soil, groundwater and sediment. Investigators collected mouse tissue samples to check for accumulation of contaminants in tissue, which have shown arsenic at levels of concern.

Sufficient data have been collected to perform a risk assessment for the site. Although the risk assessment reports have not been completed, DEQ believes there is ample evidence indicating unacceptable risk at the site.

The parties are completing a work plan to evaluate cleanup alternatives for the site's in-water portion. In addition, further upland testing of stormwater runoff is planned to determine the need for upland source control measures.

Next steps

The next three steps for this site are:

1. Completing the stormwater study to determine what cleanup alternatives should be considered for the operations area
2. Completing evaluation of cleanup alternatives for the site's in-water portion
3. Completing the remedial investigation report and risk assessment reports

As long as the responsible parties continue to fund the feasibility study work, DEQ should have necessary information to identify cleanup objectives within 18 months. Cleanup remedy development will likely take an additional six to 12 months.

The responsible party's financial status is an issue for the cleanup and for future development of waterfront activities at the site. DEQ has had discussions with the federal Superfund program about assisting with the project if it is determined that the parties cannot, or are unwilling, to cover cleanup costs.

Further information

Documents on the site are available for review at DEQ's Northwest Region Office, 2020 SW Fourth Ave., Portland. The site documents can be found in the Northwest Region Environmental



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Cleanup Site Information (ECSI) Database files under ECSI No. 91. To access the site summary information in DEQ's ECSI database, go to <http://www.deq.state.or.us/lq/ECSI/ecsiquery.asp>, then enter 91 in the Site ID box and click "Submit" at the bottom of the page. Next click the link labeled 91 in the Site ID/Info column. If you have questions please contact Debbie Bailey at 503-229-6811 or bailey.deborah.a@deq.state.or.us.

Alternative formats

Alternative formats (Braille, large type) of this document are available. Contact DEQ's Office of Communications and Outreach, Portland, at (503) 229-5696 or call toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696